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Weak Wine For Wimps--Good Medicine for the Sickly
The Case for Collective Security

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Internationally, Americans seem to feel that not everything that happens is vital or important to us. That means that a Jimmy Carter brand of world order will not sell any more than a strategy such as Kissinger's that ignores our interest in values in foreign policy. With the cold war over and communism discredited, Americans are unlikely to see the world as a zero sum game. Revolutionary change will continue but the urge to try to manage it or to shape the Third World may be less today after the experiences of the past forty years where our interventions have seemingly made little positive impact. We may slowly be realizing that our ability to shape the world unilaterally in our vision is too expensive and likely to come to naught. I sense that many Americans believe that domestic inequalities are the root cause of most revolutionary conflicts and that even the victories for which we have claimed credit --like the end of the cold war-- may have had at least as much to do with efforts and events abroad than with our actions.

Relieved at the end of the long cold war struggle, desirous of spending more domestically, frustrated that international problems continue with no end in sight, and disillusioned with the results of our expenditures over the past four decades, Americans nonetheless have come of age and realize that we must and should participate in the world for our own good. While they recognize that we cannot hide our heads in the sand, they are unwilling to pay the price or give up their values to participate as sole balancer abroad.

Interests: The assumptions outlined above and the attitudes of the American public suggest that our interests must be defined more narrowly in the future. World order is too broad and balance of power too cynical and costly. Our strategy must be interest-based and not threat-derived. The public has clearly stated that the means pursued must not jeopardize the interests we seek to defend. And in our democracy we cannot treat the public with disdain. Public involvement in and support for national security strategy are fundamental requirements for success.

Foreign Threats: Terrorism, nuclear proliferation, environmental pollution, runaway population growth and global warming are the principal threats facing Americans, along with over reliance on energy from abroad. From a physical security standpoint, technological advances make it possible for small, distant nations to develop nuclear weapons that can be smuggled into the US or used against us abroad. None of these threats can be faced by isolation, hemispheric defense or balance of power strategies. Collective action with like-minded nations to solve these problems is the only real choice we have.

Power: We have vast, latent power and the attitudinal/cultural attributes and most of the resources

focused, and Japan is a challenge but not a hegemonic threat. So who or what would a balancer balance, and to what political end? Furthermore, it is highly improbable that the American public would accept a valueless security strategy, and the balancer in a balance of power system must eschew judgments about the internal system of a hegemonic power to make the system work. Kissinger and Nixon tried to pursue such a strategy (geopolitics) and were firmly rebuffed by the American people. Not only do we lack the coldhearted resolve and singlemindedness of purpose to be a balancer in the true sense of the classical system led by the UK, but our people demand a strategy that combines power and values. Lamentably, history has shown that Americans will not for long pay the costs in lives and treasure that constant unilateral interventions on behalf of world order would entail. We want our security cheap, even if our goals and visions are lofty.

Having shown why three of the strategies lack relevance to the real threats ahead, I will now try to show why the remaining one appears attractive and why greater reliance on collective security may be the only viable and cost beneficial strategy for the new era we are entering. A look at our collective assumptions about the domestic and international environment, our interests and likely threats to them, our resources, and the nature of our power and the instruments at our disposal all suggest we place more reliance on collective security while maintaining a strong, flexible military able to intervene rapidly abroad should collective security fail us.

Assumptions about the Environment and Means: At home, Americans are looking inward where they see many pressing tasks that need attending. Having cried uncle, the USSR is no longer seen as a threat and no hegemonic power appears able to take its place as a physical menace to us. Public opinion wants lower defense spending and more attention to domestic problems. It is unwilling to give more of its GNP to the government and clearly resistant to paying more taxes for any purpose. The public has been slow to accept the reality that we are declining in relative terms as the world's most powerful nation. However, Americans have been educated that the country cannot ignore the outside world--past wars show us the folly of that course and CNN daily brings home to the public the dangers lurking outside our borders. Americans still believe we are special, unique and have a system that the world should adopt in the interest of all. We are optimists and still believe most problems can be solved. As a corollary, we tend to see conflict as abnormal and peace as a natural state of affairs. We value life much more than resources, and are unwilling to entertain the use of nuclear weapons for political purposes.

In today's world, probably any of the four national security strategies posed in question two would suffice to protect American physical security. Our nuclear forces protect us from attacks by the other nuclear powers, and our conventional forces are sufficient and mobile enough to deter non-nuclear attacks on our territory. At least for the next decade, our privileged geographic position should continue to protect us from direct physical attack. There is no hegemonic power on the horizon with the means to replace the Soviet Union as a threat to our physical security, and both the USSR and the US appear to have the technical means and the will to manage existing nuclear arsenals to prevent accidental war.

However, physical threats are not the most important challenge to our vital interests in this immediate post-cold war era. We have economic, financial and competitive problems that are more important than physical threats to our interest today. It is very important then that we select a strategy able to deal with the full range of problems ahead, and most are not equal to the task. In fact, only collective security offers the prospect of defense against the whole range of non-traditional threats facing us as well as the mounting economic and technological challenges to American strength.

At the outset we can discard hemispheric defense and isolationism as viable strategies. The seas and the UK no longer guarantee that our geographical position will give us physical protection. The former was an option when we were the world's most powerful economy, when trade was relatively insignificant to our GNP, and when we could survive alone with raw materials from Latin America. Today, we are dependent on energy, foreign markets and above all foreign capital for our prosperity, and our security rests on the foundation of a strong, growing and balanced economy. Aloofness from the world, like hemispheric defense, will not protect us from the important non-traditional and economic perils that face our nation. With the exception of Canada and Mexico, developments outside this hemisphere are more important to our security than what happens to the South. Latins are unlikely to regain their past prominent role as important bilateral trading partners because of their persistent failure to manage their economies well, and we no longer need their raw materials as much as we shift from a manufacturing to a service/technological economy.

Historically, balance of power has a better --but by no means flawless-- record than collective defense in keeping hegemonic powers from threatening order in areas central to our interests. But today there are no hegemonic powers on the scene that need balancing in areas critical to us, and there are no potential balancers other than possibly ourselves. China, Europe, and the USSR are inwardly

needed to remain the only Superpower in the world. But increasingly economic power and domestic solvency are the most relevant forms of power. Our huge budget deficits and debt burden place our economy at the whim of foreign investors and governments and international interest rate differentials. By refusing to face up to the implications of our internal economic problems for national security, we are both reducing the money available for defense and undercutting the protection that our defense establishment provides to our national interests. In psychological terms too, our economic problems and irresponsibility are undercutting foreigners' perceptions of our power, strength, and our will and purpose abroad.

Goals and Objectives: Given our perception of limited means, asymmetry will be required in our national security strategy. We must seek cost minimizing approaches and accept more risk than we might like in our security strategy. Specifically, we need to keep good trade and diplomatic relations with the EEC and Japan given their importance to our security, broadly defined. We must find ways to work with the USSR to keep the peace that bipolarity gave us. We must ensure that foreign energy producers do not hurt our economic growth, and we must work with our allies and friends to regulate the spread of nuclear weapons and ameliorate other non-traditional threats. A new international monetary system to replace Bretton Woods is required to regulate shocks to our economy.

Conclusion: Collective security requires that we give up some sovereignty and independence of action, but it is the system today that best offers us a realistic degree of security consistent with our values and the costs we are willing to pay. Furthermore, working with our allies, while entangling, allows us to combine value projection and realpolitik. We can still retain the initiative in this system and exercise leadership by galvanizing others to act on common problems. It is a proactive, not a passive strategy that allows us at least to try to shape our environment. By rejecting unilateralism, we lower costs even at the risk of less certainty in meeting our security objectives. Having to seek consensus with allies or in the UN has the added virtue of protecting ourselves from the kind of ill-conceived adventures that have failed and wrecked public consensus for active involvement abroad in the past. Should we fail in a collective endeavor with others, at least we will not be alone and "humiliated." Perhaps we can continue to get away with offering military technology and mobility in jointly meeting future military threats, thereby reducing our casualties, a sine qua non for public support for collective security involvement.

Collective security also enhances the prospects of peaceful settlement of many disputes. The collapse of the will of

one partner to stay the course is not as dangerous to the successful outcome as in the balance of power system. New international actors such as multinational corporations are also likely to favor collective, peaceful approaches to problems over unilateral actions given their scattered investments and stakes in a peaceful world order. Collective resolution of problems also allows us to spend more on our unfinished business at home, and thus obviates the need to choose between guns and butter.

As a complement to more reliance on collective security, we may find that improving our country economically and removing or at least lessening existing domestic social and political inequities will enhance our international image and convince foreigners to accept our leadership in the future. By strengthening the foundations of the City on the Hill and polishing the tarnish that others see on its steeples and monuments, we can psychologically boost our power in the eyes of others, while continuing to maintain that we are special and unique. Rather than actively export our values --which will inevitably bring disillusionment and disappointments-- we should let others freely adopt those aspects of our systems that make sense for them. If non-democratic states threaten, let the joint efforts of the international community react. This is likely to be more successful and less costly and disappointing than trying to make everyone democratic in the expectation that conflicts and aggression will thereafter cease.

As a people, we are slowly coming to recognize that we live in an interdependent world and that we must engage politically and bargain with the other countries. Our nuclear might is becoming increasingly irrelevant as a tool to bend others' will. Economic strength is increasingly effective. Collectively we need to help fashion the kind of economic world order that provides the environment that will allow us to grow, trade and convert latent resources back into more military power if collective security fails.

The policy instruments we will most need will be covert and overt intelligence to judge adversaries' intentions, capabilities and strategies better than we have in the past; skilled negotiators to forge collective responses to traditional and non-traditional challenges; and more attention to the economic health of our nation.

Perhaps more important than the security strategy we choose are strong leaders who can convince the American public that economic responsibility is key to our future preeminence and the survival of our way of life. So far no President --much less Congress-- has been willing or able to convince the public that we must sacrifice for what we want rather than pass the bill to our children or foreigners. Unless the public really recognizes that we are in this world whether

we like it or not, and that foreigners hold the key to our future unless we straighten up our economic mess, none of the four security strategy options can preserve our freedoms and vital interests.